

SCIENCE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1917

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MATHEMATICS¹

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SEVERAL circumstances combine to render peculiarly fitting a consideration at this time of the significance of mathematics. Of late we have heard much from real or alleged educators, tending to show a lack of appreciation on their part, if not on the part of the public, of the vital part which mathematics plays in the affairs of humanity. These attacks were beginning to receive some hearing in the educational world, on account of their reiteration and their vehemence, if not through intrinsic merit.

A counter influence of tremendous public force, whose import is as yet seen only by those most nearly interested, has now arisen through the existence of war and the necessities of war. To the layman, lately told by pedagogical orators that mathematics lacks useful application, the evident need of mathematical training on every hand now comes as a distinct surprise.

The attacks on mathematics, and the lay conception of the entire subject, centers naturally around elementary and secondary instruction. We ourselves, college teachers of mathematics, have commonly talked of current practise and of reforms, largely with respect to secondary education. The third influence which contributes toward the present situation and which may strongly affect its future development is the formation and the existence of this great association, which affords for the first time in the history of America an adequate

MSS. intended for publication and books, etc., intended for review should be sent to The Editor of Science, Garrison-on-Hudson, N. Y.

¹ Retiring Presidential Address, Mathematical Association of America, summer meeting, Cleveland, September 6, 1917.